

Papet March 30th. 1826

Medical
Observations,

Made during a short period on the
Western Coast of Africa,

By
George Turrell
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Virginia

1788

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It is not my intention, in the present paper, to indulge in speculation, but, merely to give a faithful detail of such facts, as fell under my immediate observation, during a short cruise, on the Western coast of Africa, in the rainy season of 1824. As the same ground has been passed over, by Linnæ, and other distinguished Surgeons of the British Navy, it can scarcely be supposed, with my limited experience that I should be competent to offer, to the consideration of the Faculty, any circumstances of importance, which has not been already spread before the profession, by those more able and faithful observers of nature.

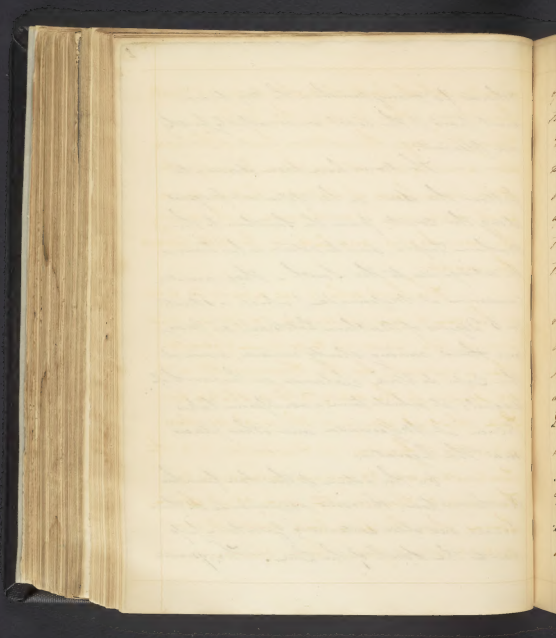
That part of the coast, which lies between the Tropics, has, properly speaking, been divided into two seasons, the Wet, and the Dry. The former is the season of sickness;

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Whereas, for many months in the Dry Season, most parts of the coast are remarkably healthy and pleasant.

The rains have been observed to follow the Sun, in his apparent progress along the coast, from the Southern to the Northern Tropics, and to return in his train as he retrogrades to the South - They usually commence at Meperanda, (which is situated in 6 Degrees of Northern Latitude) in May, and thence, moving slowly onwars, arrive at the Cape de Verde Islands, in the month of August; at which time a revulsion takes place, at Meperanda, and other places near the Equator.

On the return of the Sun from his Northern tour, the rains recommence at those places, and after continuing for a time, pass over to the South of the Line. They, generally



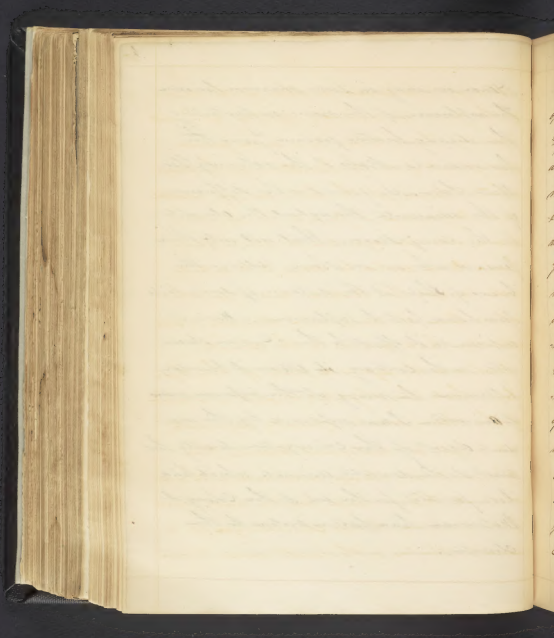
of water which falls at night is much greater than at any other period of the 24 hours.

During the day, the intense heat of Vertical Sun, enables the Atmosphere, to support its immense load of Vapour, but as soon as its influence is withdrawn in the evening, the rain begins, and falls in torrents through the night.

The heat which we experienced while on the coast, did not exceed 79 degrees, which is much less, (according to common observation) than is indicated by the Thermometer, in the dry season of the year. It is stated by Linné, that at Senegal, (the most northern extremity of Guinea), in December 1763, the Temperature was 73 degrees, measured by Fahrenheit's Thermometer, and 78 at Sierra Leone, when the Sun, had made its most distant retreat, from those places, —

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Never are my in down measure, however
the influence of the rain, in protecting
the already broken ground, from the
pernicious rays of the returning Ob-
stinate Sun. - So general is the diffusion
of the miasmata, throughout the atmosphere,
in the rainy season, that not only those
persons, who are on shore, but even the
Crews of Ships, at the distance of some miles
from land, feel its influence. - Nor is it
confined in its effects to the Human species
only; on the contrary, it extends its baneful
influence, to many of the inferior orders
of Animals. - I was informed by the sci-
entist agent of the Colonization Society, that
most of the domestic Animals, which had
been procured for the use of the Colony, at
Neversham, had fallen victims to the
climate.



Stranger, who remain in there, at this season
of the year are variously affected, with inter-
mittent Fevers, there is a more general
derangement of all the functions of the body-
when, at London, at the little colonies, settled
as at Malabar. I observe the aspect of
disease, strongly depicted in almost every
face. None could be said, to be entirely
well, except the Natives and a few others
whose time and uncommon strength of Con-
stitution, has insured to the Climate.

Such was the depressed state of the Sys-
tem that the slightest derelict or abatement
of the skin would speedily degenerate
into a foul and malignant Ulcer - This
Ulcerous Ulcer always, commenced with an
obscure Tumour, from the East, when
fully developed it was characterized, by a
circular shape, with elevat. edges and an



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coloured surface, under, inner, with coarsula
of blood and excessive heat with heat and
swelling of the adjacent parts. The local
irritation thus however is not confined to
influence to the general system, producing
considerable local action - as was indicated.
But, the viridic heat, under, do not seem
and hence tension, together with a very
great derangement of the digestion organs.
The inhabitants of the colony consider it
an incurable disease, though I know of
only one case in which it terminated fatally.
In that instance, it attacked the thing
of an indisposed tendency and soon its course
in a few days. - There cases of the disease
which have continued for one or two years
several of which came under my observation
for their irritable character, and of some
that of the spleen described by Mr. Jones,



is situated in parts, too weak to support a
healthy action.

As to the treatment, my experience
enables me to say but little. The few cases
that occur in France, in which appeared to
be aggravated by Cures, and all by application.
The use of Opium, however, in the form of a
phloction to the part, is always a most salutary
influence. It not only alleviates the
Pain, but changes entirely the character of
the disease action. The most effective re-
medy, however, was a change of climate.

As soon as we left the rains, and fell in
with the trade winds on our passage to the
West Indies the Pileus all disappeared, and
we had no further trouble with them.

The disease, most formidable to
struggle, at this season of the year, is the
Vicious Rheumatic Fever. It is always most



malignant at the beginning of the rains, and gradually, whether in violence, as the seasons advances, and the constitution becomes accustomed to the climate - Of the cases of this disease which fell under my observation, there were most violent, which were contracted by imprudent exposure in Shore; but of six persons who thus contracted the disease, two died and the other four narrowly escaped with life. -

When the disease occurred on board the vessel anchored at the distance of 5 miles from land, the attacks were mild, and the persons entirely free from danger.

The disease was generally preceded by a mild dysentery of several days duration.

In some cases however, it preceded any dysentery some times. - A remarkable instance of this kind



was furnished to the care of the gentleman who was sent by the Government of the United States, to enquire into the state of the colony at Mofemada. - In attending to the duties of his mission, this gentleman became ill, and remained on shore six or eight days. When he returned on board the vessel he was in the most perfect health, and continued so, until the eighth day, after our departure from the coast, when, upon descending ^{hastily} the cabin ladder, he made a false step and to my surprise notwithstanding the slightness of the shock, he was immediately seized with a severe headache, followed in the course of a few hours, by the most violent febrile symptoms. - In another instance the attack came on more suddenly, in the form of an apoplectic fit. - To these anomalous cases, I may add, that whenever a strong predisposition



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the Rheumatism was then, the fever was for a
time diagnosed under the character of that
disease. -

I thought it may be a digression,
yet it may not perhaps be altogether irre-
levant, to mention here, a very singular cir-
cumstance, and one, which I have been several
times reminded of in my former, on visiting our healthy
posts; namely, that, those persons, who were
laboring under strictures of the Uræthra, were
very apt to be seized with a complete suppression
of Urine; so soon as we arrived at those pla-
ces, where the atmosphere was much con-
taminated; This is a very curious Phenom-
enon, and illustrates two points; first the
extensive influence, which the miasmatica
exerts over the system, and secondly, the
great tendency of diseased action, to find it
even in the remotest part of the body).



The fever was generally, not high in, by a well defined chill, when fully developed, it was characterized by the following symptoms, a violent, full, and strong pulse, hot skin, flushed face, brown bucculae, brown tongue, slightly tinged with yellow, in the stomach, occasional slight intestinal contraction, pain in the abdomen, and in the right side of the chest, soreness of the throat, cough, and the excretion of thick viscid matter. The remissions were very irregular in their recurrence, generally however, they occurred in the morning.

The inspiration incident to this stage, was so profuse, as to be regarded among the most formidable circumstances attendant on the disease.

To the symptoms which have been already enumerated, as characterizing this dis.



case; there were suppurated, in one or two cases.
Several anomalous appearances. In one case
there was an eruption of very small blisters,
during the intermission, which was the cause
of great inquietude to the patient. In another
there was a severe pain in the Testicles, and
in the progress of the case, the scrotum, con-
tracted firmly, assumed a dark colour, and
was marked with deep Rhagades on its surface.

If not checked by the remedial
agents, employed for its removal, the disease
in the course of three or four days, assumes
a Typhoid character, when the skin, and
eyes become yellow, the extremities cold,
and the pulse small, quick and feeble.

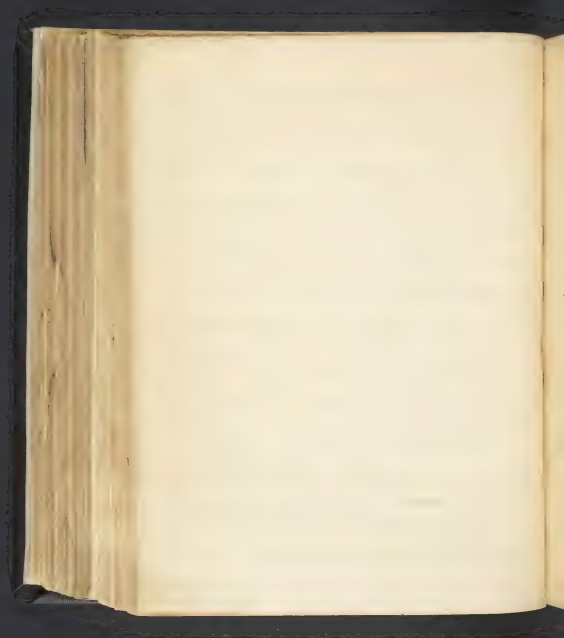
In those more suppurated, and severe
cases, the most alarming symptoms, such
as, black tongue, coma, delirium, petechiae, and
involuntary discharges of Feces and Urine. ...



on the sixth or seventh day the disease came
to a crisis, which was attended, in every instance
it was in relation to the same father's blood.

It would appear from this Circumstance
combined with several of the symptoms, men-
tioned, in the former character of the disease,
that there must have been an inflammatory
affection of the lungs, associated with the
disease. This was owing perhaps, to a strong
pre disposition to pneumonia which existed
at the time, it having been the prevailing
disease in the hospital, and the weather
the coast, and soon after we left the
room it returned and became more violent.

The treatment of the early stage of
this disease consisted principally, in bloodletting,
and purging. In some instances there was an
effusion of blood to the amount of 20 or 30 ounces.
The large bleeding generally effected all that



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it cannot be expected of, performing some service.
It shows the tendency to Typhus in most
instances, that it would have been highly
important, to repeat the operation. The then
the tendency to other modes of vaccination, for
more safe and perhaps more efficacious for the
further reduction of malignant and vascular
action. let the means of these. Operations, should
conspicuous. They were called for by many in-
dications and employed with no sparing hand.

He at first, resorted to the most active vehicles,
such as Calomel, Guallage some jalap, in
various doses of Combination and later some
assisted in their operation by the Osmunda
-Cin, or divided doses of some of the Neutral
Salts, as also by injections. The best materials
for which were always found ready at hand,
without the trouble of preparation. I should
be sorry to common sea water distilled in water.



diately from the Ocean, and used pro re nata.

The bowels having been well evacuated, and the violence of the excitement subsided, we had recourse, with much advantage, to some of the milder Euphoretic Medicines; such as the Spiritus Mindereri, or small doses of the Tartrate of Antimony, either alone, or in combination with Calomel, and Nitre of Potash.

The irritable state of the Stomach in several cases, was found to be a serious impediment to the administration of Medicines - To correct this, a variety of the power remedies, were put in requisition. Nothing, however, made the least impression upon the Symptom, except a strong infusion of Virginia Snake Root - This given in the dose of a wine glass full, and repeated as often as the violence of the Symptoms demanded, acted like



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a charm, not only composing the stomach,
but obviating the profuse perspiration incident
to the same illness. Assisted by the use of this
invaluable medicine, we should have formed
ourselves totally incompetent, to the manage-
ment of these cases.

Emetics were used in one or two
instances but as no good effect seemed to result
they were abandoned.

^{the treatment of} Scurvy, which has a high repu-
tation, in almost all, Tropical diseases,
was soon called to our assistance; and from
the liberal manner, in which it was used,
we soon had several cases, under its full
influence. Our highly wrought anticipations
of success, from the employment of this Me-
dicine, were however by no means realised,
no case was improved by it, and some were
evidently made worse, it was therefore given



aside, as not merely useless, but injurious.

After the use of the more directly depleting measures, Blebs were employed with effect, in removing the severe pain in the side.

Bark was administered in a variety of forms, but no benefit resulted from its use, until the force of the disease was broken, and the patient evidently convalescent.

There was nothing peculiar in the treatment of the second, or Typhoid stage of the disease. He generally, commenced with the Eucalypti of our room, in the form of the Whetstone Julep, and followed it up with, Wine, Brandy, and other more powerful stimulants, as the urgency of the case demanded. —

Blebs to the head, were not resorted to, when the brain was much affected, were very efficacious. —



Convalescence was observed to be uncommonly slow - Long after the termination of the disease was subdued, the patients continued in a lingering state of health. Most of them were affected with a pain in the right side, numbness of the inferior extremities, & venous swellings of the feet and ankles, and more or less derangement of the digestive Organs.

There was, in every instance, a very great susceptibility to malarial impressions. This was evinced so strongly, that I could, by its means, test the purity of the atmosphere of the different places we visited in the West India Islands; In proof of this remark, I may state, that, at the time we arrived at this Island of Saint Thomas, the convalescents were pricking about the decks, but we had not been in port, more than 24 hours before they were all confined to their



births, with symptoms of violent fever.

The same thing occurred in the Havana, and again in Matanzas. It was remarked in every instance, that the condition of the Sick, was much improved after putting to Sea.

These lingering cases were found exceedingly difficult to manage, in the best climate of the West Indies. Purging, antimonials, and Mercury, proved quite ineffectual, and a favorable opportunity presenting itself, the afflicted, were returned to the United States, under the impression, that a change of climate, might accomplish, that, which Medicine had been found incompetent to effect.

This brings to a conclusion, the principal observations, which I have been able to make, on those diseases, which came under my immediate notice, on

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The Western coast of Africa.

Imperfect as they are, I submit
them, to the enlightened wisdom of the
Faculty. 